

2300-320-1 - THE NIH STAFF FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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A. Purpose and Scope This issuance describes the NIH Staff Fellowship Program authorized by 42 CFR, Part 61 B, Public Health Service Regulations. It does not apply to NIH components that do not conduct direct research.

B. Basic Program Provisions

- 1. The NIH Staff Fellowship Program is designed to provide a

flexible mechanism for the term employment and professional development of promising research scientists. It accelerates the Fellow's career and professional development by affording opportunities to use the unexcelled facilities at NIH and to work in close association with leading authorities in all branches of the biomedical and behavioral sciences. It also provides the opportunity to observe an investigator's performance for an extended period of time.

2. Staff Fellowships serve to strengthen research in the biomedical and behavioral sciences by insuring a continuous exchange of talent between NIH and other research centers. As staffing needs permit, outstanding Staff Fellows may be offered permanent research investigator appointments to NIH. Such appointments may be made through the Civil Service or Commissioned Corps.
3. The Staff Fellowship Program is not appropriate for use when investigators have clearly demonstrated their research capabilities.
4. This program normally is not used for physicians whose main function is the furnishing of medical support for patients. Also, Staff Fellows may not be used to fill positions of program direction, e.g., laboratory chief or section head, or to fill positions in which personal research is not the principal responsibility, e.g., positions primarily concerned with patient care, contract management or other service activities.

C. **Qualifications** The Staff Fellowship Program is used to employ investigators whose prior research experience--whether outside or within NIH--does not provide an adequate basis for a conclusive evaluation of their research capabilities. Promising research scientists may be offered fellowships within the following criteria:

1. Candidates with less than 3 years of professional level research experience enter the program as Staff Fellows.
2. Senior Staff Fellowships may be offered to those having 3 to 7 years of professional level research experience or who are physicians with 3 or more years of specialty training in fields related to NIH research.
3. Staff Fellows with 3 or more years of experience may be considered for advancement to Senior Staff Fellow.

4. Candidates for both the Staff Fellowship and Senior Staff Fellowship must be U. S. Citizens or resident aliens who would be eligible for citizenship within 4 years. They must either have been awarded their doctoral degrees in a biomedical, behavioral or related science, or have been certified by a university as meeting all the requirements leading to such a doctorate. Degree requirements may be waived by the Deputy Director for Science, or the Assistant Director for Intramural Affairs, in those rare cases where training and experience are judged to equal the stature and achievement normally associated with the doctoral degree.

D. Duration of Fellowships

1. Staff Fellowship appointments are made initially for 2 years, except that in converting a Commissioned Officer to Staff Fellowship status, the initial award may be made for either 1 or 2 years. The offer of appointment including beginning and termination dates must be made in writing by the BID Scientific Director. Additional 1 year extensions may be made with the approval of the Scientific Director. As special needs may require, the Scientific Director may also approve extensions of less than 1 year. Normally, Staff Fellowships may not be extended so as to cause the Fellow's total service at NIH in a nontenure status (such as time under the Commissioned Corps Associate Program) to exceed 5 years. Should it be necessary for the completion of a research project an exception to extend an appointment beyond 5 years may be made as provided by Section K. The request for an exception will be forwarded to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health for final approval.
2. Staff Fellows must receive written notification of all extensions from the Scientific Director. (See Appendix 4)

E. Stipends

1. Stipends are established by the Scientific Director within the limits specified in Appendix 1.
2. The Scientific Director may approve stipend increases on an individual basis in amounts of \$500 or \$1,000 and which may be made effective at the beginning of the second year of the Fellow's appointment. The Scientific Director may also approve similar increases for Staff Fellows who are proposed for extension of appointments. Those Staff Fellows recommended for stipend increases must have such increases justified in writing

by the supervisor which reflect the Fellow's research achievements and potential.

Criteria for \$500 and \$1,000 increases are as follows:

\$500: The Staff Fellow must be achieving the research goals and objectives established at the time of the appointment and which are satisfactory to the supervisor.

\$1,000: Significantly exceed research goals established at the time of appointment as evidenced by special effectiveness on the part of the research investigator in pursuing research goals.

3. Stipend increases will be processed on SF's 52, Request for Personnel Action, as "Administrative Pay Increase." Stipend increases greater than \$1,000 must be fully justified and an exception requested under Section K, (except when converting Staff Fellow to Senior Staff Fellow which may require an increase of more than \$1,000).
4. The Board of Scientific Directors periodically reviews the pattern of such stipend increases, as well as the range of levels, and recommends to the Director, NIH, adjustments when needed to more closely approximate the salaries of comparable Classification Act and Commissioned Corps positions. The Director, NIH, may authorize across-the-board adjustments which correspond to periodic pay adjustments made for General Schedule employees.

The Director, NIH, may also authorize extensions of the stipend level ranges as may be needed to bring such stipend levels in line with comparable salary levels established for Classification Act and Commissioned Corps positions. Such pay adjustments and extensions of stipend ranges are carried out by the Personnel Office which has appointing authority.

F. Evaluation of Research Achievements and Potential

1. During the course of research projects, supervisors will evaluate the Staff Fellow's research achievements and potential. An annual written evaluation will be provided to the Scientific Director for review and approval. A recommendation for stipend increase and extension of appointment may also be included as part of this evaluation.

2. Supervisors should periodically discuss and assess with the Staff Fellow, his/her research achievements and potential for further development. Recommendations for stipend increases, extensions and evaluation of research achievements which are approved by the Scientific Director may also be used as part of this discussion. Such recommendations made in writing must be made available to the Staff Fellow upon request.

G. Applicability of Civil Service Regulations

1. Regulatory provisions in the following subject areas apply to the employment of Staff Fellows on the same basis as other Civil Service employees:

Compensation for Injury

Conduct Requirements and Restrictions on Political Activity, Outside Work, etc.

*Group Life Insurance (FEGLI Program)

*Health Insurance (FEHB Program)

Occupational Medical Service Facilities at NIH

Leave - Annual and Sick

Medical Qualifications Requirements

Overtime, Night, and Holiday Pay

*Retirement (CS Retirement System)

Training at Government Expense

Withholding Tax

*Entitlement only if initial appointment exceeds 1 year.

The coverage of Staff Fellows by the above programs or requirements is governed by specific law or regulation and is not subject to administrative change.

2. Insofar as position classification is concerned, the requirements for position descriptions do not apply. Instead, brief statements of major duties or projects are required at the time of recruitment and should be described in the memorandum recommending appointment.
3. Special provisions relating to travel of Staff Fellows are covered in H. below.

H. Travel Benefits

1. The following policies apply to travel allowances for Staff Fellows which are payable under authority of Section 61.37, Public Health Service Regulations:

- a. The Fellow is authorized travel allowances or transportation and per diem to his/her first duty station from place of actual residence payable at authorized Civil Service rates. This coverage is authorized for all occupational categories. Coverage for the Fellow's immediate family and/or transportation of household effects may be authorized only as an exception as provided by Section K.
 - b. Transportation and subsistence expenses incurred while traveling on official business during the term of the fellowship, are the same as provided other Civil Service employees. (5 USC 5701-5707)
 - c. Travel allowances or transportation and per diem for the Fellow and his immediate family, transportation of household goods and personal effects, and applicable relocation allowances in conjunction with a change of duty station ordered by NIH during the term of the fellowship are the same as provided for other Civil Service employees. (5 USC 5724 and 5724a)
2. Claims for reimbursement are made on SF 1012, Travel Voucher, as prescribed in the DHEW Travel Manual.

I. Consideration of Applications for Staff Fellowships

1. Staff Fellowship applications and referrals for consideration are coordinated by the Personnel Staffing Branch, Division of Personnel Management. Personnel Offices are required to review the PSB Staff Fellowship Applicant File for consideration against BID openings. Veterans preference laws and regulations will apply to the Staff Fellow Applicant File maintained in PSB. Specific processing requirements and procedures which apply in considering candidates and effecting fellowship appointments are given in Appendix 2.
2. A brochure which may be used by BID program officials to provide summary information to prospective candidates is available in the Personnel Staffing Branch, and copies may be obtained upon telephone request. The brochure is identified as DHEW Publication No. (NIH) 76-15, NIH Staff Fellowship Programs.
3. Candidates are assured equality of opportunity and may not be excluded from consideration for the Staff Fellowship Program

due to race, color, religion, sex, handicap, age or national origin.

J. Evaluation Considerations for Conversion to Permanent Tenure

1. Recommendation for conversion from a fellowship to a permanent appointment requires a thorough assessment of the Fellow's research achievements by the BID and the prior review and approval of the Deputy Director for Science or the Assistant Director for Intramural Affairs. Evaluation of research achievements and recommendation for conversion are initiated by the Fellow's supervisor for review and endorsement by the BID Scientific Director. If conversion is deemed appropriate, the Scientific Director forwards the recommendation to the Deputy Director for Science, for presentation to the Board of Scientific Directors for their review and recommendation.
2. Conversion to permanent appointment as an individual investigator may be recommended by the Fellow's supervisor whenever the Fellow's research experience and performance are sufficiently advanced to permit a clear and favorable assessment of his potential as an investigator. However, it is generally considered that 2 years of professional research experience at NIH would be a minimum requirement for conversion. The result of the review process might be an approval of conversion, a disapproval, i.e., recommendation that employment be sought elsewhere, or a recommendation that the fellowship continue so as to permit reevaluation at a later date.
3. In some instances, the research activities of a Fellow may evolve to include increasing responsibility for supervision and program leadership, to the extent that the Fellow should be designated as a section head or equivalent. When this occurs, the supervisor should prepare recommendations immediately for conversion to permanent appointment in the appropriately designated position, since retention in a fellowship status is inappropriate and conversion to such position is subject to review by the Board of Scientific Directors and approval by the Deputy Director for Science or the Assistant Director for Intramural Affairs.
4. Conversely, over a period of time, the personal research activities of some Fellows may have diminished to a point where their work performance cannot be evaluated on that basis; rather, they are primarily involved in contract management or other service activities. When this situation occurs the Staff

Fellow's supervisor should promptly evaluate the duties actually performed. This evaluation and assessment requires a decision by the responsible Scientific Director as to whether personal research activities should be restored as the primary responsibility, or whether conversion to permanent appointment should be recommended on the basis of contract management or other service activities. Recommendation for conversion in these cases should be presented through the Associate Director for Collaborative Research or other appropriate channel.

5. Processing requirements to be followed upon decision and approval to convert a Fellow to a permanent Civil Service or Commissioned Corps appointment are stated in Appendix

3.

Approval constitutes a firm commitment to conversion, subject to meeting the regulatory requirements, and any administrative limitations outside the control of the NIH.

K. Exceptions and Changes to Program Provisions

1. In applying the established policies and practices to individual cases, there may be occasion in which program officials believe that an exception is warranted. These exceptions may fall under the following categories: e.g., qualifications (research experience and education), extension beyond 5 years which also require Assistant Secretary for Health approval, travel benefits, and stipend levels. Requests must be justified in writing including the nature and basis for the exception. Requests must be routed through the Scientific Director, Chief, Personnel Staffing Branch, Director, Division of Personnel Management, to the Deputy Director for Science or the Assistant Director for Intramural Affairs. A copy of each request will be retained by the Chief, Personnel Staffing Branch. The approved original will be made part of the Staff Fellow's Official Personnel Folder.
2. Proposed changes to the Staff Fellowship Program will be presented to the Board of Scientific Directors for their consideration. Such proposals for change will then be made available to Staff Fellows for their comment. The Board of Scientific Directors will again review proposed changes together with Staff Fellow comments. Following approval by the Board of Scientific Directors, requests for program changes will be forwarded to the Assistant Secretary for Health by the Director, NIH, as outlined in PHS Instruction 302-5.

L. Supply of Forms Personnel Staffing Branch, DPM, maintains a supply

of Staff Fellow brochures and fellowship application forms for requisitioning by BID Personnel Offices.

Appendix 1 - Stipend Tables

Effective January 1, 1993, stipends for the NIH Staff Fellowship Program are established with the following limits:

	Staff Fellows	Senior Staff Fellows
Physicians		
Current Stipend Ranges	\$28,000 - \$48,196*	\$39,000 - \$73,472*
Grade/Step	*GS-11/8	*GS-13/10
Other Doctorate		
Current Stipend Ranges	\$28,000 - \$47,013	\$33,504 - \$62,293
Grade/Step	GS-12/6	GS-13/10

*Medical Officer (Research), GS-602 special salary rate scale.

Stipend levels in excess of the maximum provided above may be established only for extraordinary reasons and only through the use of the procedures discussed in Section K.

A. Method of Applying One copy of a completed PHS Form 3997, Application for Staff Fellowship Program at the NIH, must be submitted along with transcripts of graduate college records and a brief summary of the applicant's doctoral dissertation. An individual may apply to a specific BID or may send an application to the Personnel Staffing Branch, DPM, for concurrent referral to all BID's having possible interest.

B. Receipt and Review of Applications

1. The organization which first receives a Staff Fellowship application determines the candidate's basic eligibility.
 - a. BID receiving applications may consider qualified applicants for prospective openings. If there are no openings, applications should be forwarded to PSB, for

entry into the Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File.

- b. PSB, upon receipt of applications, will enter qualified candidates into the Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File for a period of 4 months.
2. The following actions are taken in order to assure that all candidates who meet the requirements are given full consideration.
 - a. Personnel Staffing Branch:
 - (1) Maintains Staff Fellowship applicant file which must be reviewed by personnel offices for consideration against BID Staff Fellowship openings.
 - (2) Screens and refers applications against BID requests.
 - (3) If an application is concurrently referred to two or more BID's, advises them so that reference checks and interviews may be coordinated to obviate duplicate efforts and offers.
 - b. BID Personnel Offices: In taking the following steps, it is important that program officials keep their personnel officers currently advised of the receipt and status of applications, and that personnel officers assist program officials, as needed, in evaluating candidates and in completing the processing requirements promptly.
 - (1) Use of the Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File
Personnel offices should be aware of BID opportunities for Staff Fellowship appointments and use the PSB applicant supply file as a resource. The personnel office may make periodic requests for applications to be considered against anticipated needs, or individual requests may be made for specific openings. Requests must specify the area of research expertise required. Referrals will be made against selective factors specified. Veterans preference eligibles who meet the selective factors must be given first consideration.
 - (2) If interested in considering a candidate for award of a fellowship, makes reference checks, evaluates, and makes selection determination. If selection is desired, takes action as stated in C. below.

- (3) Personnel office returns applications of those who are nonselected to the Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File, PSB.
- (4) If an applicant has applied directly to a BID and there are no appropriate openings, personnel office forwards the application to the Personnel Staffing Branch for entry into the Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File.

C. Actions Required Following Selection When a candidate is selected for a fellowship award, the BID:

1. Sends a written notice of fellowship award, signed by the Scientific Director, to the selected candidate. (See Appendix 5)
2. Following receipt of acceptance, sends the selectee a letter from the Personnel Officer (see Appendix 5) which:
 - a. Describes the arrangement for a pre-employment physical, if applicable, and travel to first duty station.
 - b. Includes SF 85, Security Investigative Data for Nonsensitive Positions, and W-4, Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate, together with instructions for their completion and return.
 - c. Requests that evidence of military service, if any, be furnished at the time of reporting to duty.
 - d. Includes brochures on the Federal Employees' Health Benefits and Life Insurance programs, in order to give the selectee an opportunity, before entering on duty, to decide about participating.
3. Prepares and processes SF 52, Request for Personnel Action, in sufficient copies to provide two for DPM--one to be retained by the personnel office, one to be forwarded to the appointing office. Documents the SF 52 to indicate Staff Fellow Applicant Supply File has been reviewed for consideration. The Nature of Action entry on the request is "Excepted Appointment NTE (date)" and the authority is 42 U.S.C. 209(g). The award letter and any later letter to the selected candidate, reference replies, application form, and any other supplemental data obtained are attached to the copy of the SF 52 for the

Fellow's official personnel folder.

4. The appointing office prepares the SF 50, Notification of Personnel Action. Each BID gives the oath of office and orientation, at which time fingerprints are obtained, and the SF 85 and W 4, if not previously received.